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THE SIOUX LANGUAGE.

The following is the paper by the Rev. Mr. Burman which was read before the Historical and Scientific Society on Thursday evening:—

THE SIOUX LANGUAGE.

The language of the Dakotas—commonly called Sioux—was formerly spoken from the Mille Lac region in Minnesota westward, to or even beyond the Missouri. Driven westward by the march of civilization, the Dakota's are now principally to be found in the territory called after the nation and westward to the Rocky Mountains.

It has been stated in more than one work that they are a branch of the great Algonquin nation, of which the Cree, Ojibway and Ottawa tribes form part. It is not easy to ascertain the grounds upon which this opinion is based. In the matter of language, with which we have now more particularly to deal, they are extremely unlike each other, as we shall presently see.

The great Marquette, writing of these people about 1670, says: "Their language is entirely different from the Huron and Algonquin;" and again in the Relations of the Jesuits we find it stated: "There are a certain people called Nadouessi (i. e. Dakotas) They dwell on the shores of, and around the great river Messipi . . . They speak a peculiar language, entirely distinct from that of the Algonquins and Hurons."

This opinion has been held by later writers, and is the one adopted by the Rev. E. D. Neill, the able historian of Minnesota, who believes the Sioux belong to a distinct family of aborigines. The language is an eminently difficult one for Europeans to comprehend and speak, partly because of its peculiar idiom, partly owing to the harsh gutturals, and various aspirates, which are quite foreign to the English and Romance languages. There are five vowels, which, except when followed by a nasalized n are each uniform in sound, i. e., a as in rather, e as in obey, i as in machine, o as in mote, and u as oo in rood.

The consonants are twenty-four, from which our f, q, r, v and x, are excluded, and including an emphatic c, uttered with a clicking sound, a very deep guttural g, a strong guttural h, something like the sound generally given to the Hebrew Cheth, an emphatic p and t, and a nasal n.

As these strange sounds cannot be expressed by means of our ordinary type, the letters are generally distinguished by dots above or below. There is a good illustration of the need of some such plan in the now almost classical word Min-ne-ha-ha. In both cases the h should be pronounced as a strong surd guttural, so that, as a fact, the word which is so often quoted as an example of the beauty of Indian names, is when properly pronounced as uncouth as we could desire. Besides these unusual sounds there is in Dakota a peculiar hiatus, for one can hardly call it a sound, which is more like the Hebrew sh'va, than anything else with which I am acquainted. It is much used in the formation of what may perhaps be called habitual verbal nouns—such as wit-kos'a—a drunkard.

This is perhaps the proper place to mention the commutation of vowels, and the change of consonants, for the sake of euphony, which, though it adds to the beauty of the language, adds one more obstacle to progress therein. Here too we should refer briefly to the dialectical differences, which are naturally found in such a wide-spread language. There are seven tribes of Dakotas, with more or less variation in dialect. Such are the substitution of a guttural for an aspirate—of d for t and h for n. The greatest divergence, however, is seen in the Titon-wan (the dialect of the famous Sitting Bull's tribe), where a hard g often takes the place of h, and d altogether rejected is replaced by l. Judging from what I know of this dialect I venture to say that in melody and grace it is not surpassed by any language in the North-West, whether barbarous or otherwise. In many cases the dialects have distinctly different names for common objects.

The idiom of the language is very natural, the very reverse of ours. For instance, we say 'make a big fire'—in Dakota the words would stand thus, 'fire big make,' so that an interpreter will generally begin where we leave off—working backwards. This is one of the difficulties we have to encounter in obtaining a thorough knowledge of the language. It is not easy to learn to think in Dakota. The usual eight parts of speech are found in the language. Hight in his "Indian Researches," p. 31, has somewhat hastily denied the existence in Indian tongues of that useful particle the preposition. The answer to this in so far as the Ojibway and Cree are concerned, may be found by consulting the dictionaries by Bishop Baraga and Mr. Watkins, and other works. In

Dakota there are at least twenty separate prepositions, as many formed from adverbs, and many incorporated in other words.

Like all other American languages, Dakota is polysynthetic—words or fragments of words are thrown together, so as to convey one or more ideas to the mind. This agglutination or word-building is not, however, carried out to nearly as great an extent as in some other languages. The words are never immoderately long, while they have a fullness of meaning which is rarely found in English. For example, take the adjective, "walipanica," destitute. If we analyse this word, we shall find, first, a shortened form of "walipaya," baggage, or moveable goods, and next "nica" a verb-to have none. As a result of the analysis then, we find that, applied to persons, this word signifies one who is destitute of moveable goods. He has nothing to carry about, and is therefore from a roving Indian's point of view poor indeed. It is, however, in the verb that we see best the use and beauty of this system. There are nearly one hundred primitive verbal roots from which simple, or compound verbs are formed. The simple form of the verb is the 3rd pers. sing. indic. which also stands for the infinitive, and in some cases for the present participle. From this are fomed the different inflexions to which verbs are subject. First we have the three conjugations. into which Dr. Riggs, the grammarian of the language, has classed them, marked by different nominative pronouns of 1st and 2nd persons. The only thing to which particular reference need be made here is the use in conjugation 3, of objective pronouns, for the nominative in neuter and adjective verbs: e.g., i-ma-pu-za. I am thirsty—where ma is really the object pronoun.

Person—Next we have person. Here we should remark that, as in Hebrew, only the 1st and 2nd persons are represented by nom-pronouns. Even in the objective case the 3rd pers. is only represented, in the plural by "wica," contracted from "wi-ca-sta" man.

Number—In Dakota verbs, as in Greek, there are three numbers, singular, dual, and plural. In the consideration of number we meet with one of the greatest defects in the language. As there is but one plural termination to every inflexion of the verb, it is often impossible to make out the meaning of a verb apart from the rest of its context thus, "ana-un-niptapi" may mean either—"we forbid thee" (sing) or "we forbid you" (plur.) Again "ananiptapi" may mean either "they forbid thee," "he forbids you," or "they forbid you." Such being the case it is often extremely difficult to follow a rapid speaker, through a long and complicated sentence with anything like satisfaction.

Mood—Next we have the moods. indicative, infinitive and imperative. The infinitive is, as I have said the same as the 3rd per. sing. indic. The imperative is indicated by the use of certain suffixed syllables. It is a curious fact that these syllables vary with the sex of the speaker. Those used by men seem to imply a command; those used by women an entreaty, and while men may occasionally use the latter, women never venture to employ the former. This would seem to indicate pretty clearly the social status of woman amongst the Dakotas. The optative and potential moods are indicated by the use of separate particles or auxiliary verbs ; so that as a rule there is no difficulty in denoting what is usually expressed by these words. There is one strange exception to this rule. It is utterly impossible to express, clearly and forcibly, the idea of compulsion or obligation. We can say it is right, fitting, such or such a thing should be done, but we cannot say it ought to be, or must be, done. Archbishop Trench in his "study of words," says that language is fossil history and ethics. If this be true, as it doubtless is ; if—to keep to the case before us.—words embody, petrify, the conviction of or perversions of the moral sense ; may we not also say, that the lack of words to express moral obligation, testifies as much to an absence of the convictions of such, as the absence of certain fossil species in this land tells against the probability of their having ever existed here. The idea of necessity or compulsion never seems to enter a Dakota's mind. He is essentially a free man. His chief is only primus inter pares, who sways his people by eloquence or example, not by force. Children are not ruled, but led, drawn on by the silken cords of persuasion, or incited to any act by appeals to their regard for the good opinion of their fellow men. Let me here express the conviction, that much light may be thrown upon the social history of aborigines by researches into the depths of their languages. It is a vein well worth working. Let us hope the members of this Society may do much in this direction. But to proceed.—

Tenses—We now come to the tenses. The two usually found are the indefinite, and future. The former is used as a present, imperfect and aorist, without any distinctive marks. A past perfect may be formed by adding a simple particle to the indefinite. The future is formed by adding the particle "Kta" to the indefinite. This form is also used as a future participle in historic narrative. It has another curious use, either with or without the addition of a particle about equal to our, "but that" it becomes almost equivalent to the pluperfect tense conditional mood in Latin, but it also predicates the existence of some cause which prevented the performance of what would have been done. Then again, the future, with the addition of an intensitive adverb, assums a final or desiderative force. It covers the whole ground of the optative mood, and a good deal more besides.

I have purposely left till now the discussion of perhaps the most interesting of the inflections—what is commonly expressed by "form." In English if we wish to express the indefinite object, or a dative of the remoter object, or the

idea of reflection, we have to make additions to the sentence. But in Dakota, this is done by a slight expansion of the verb. These forms are named by Dr. Riggs as follows: 1. Frequentative, marked by the repetition of the last syllable, as "ka-to-to," "to rap, as at a door;" "ka-bu-bu," "to drum." It is, however, to be noted that this reduplication is grammatically necessary. It would be a solecism to say either ka-to or ka-bu in the above examples. 2. Absolute, having reference to some indefinite object, e. g. "a-ki-ta," "to seek;" "wa-a-ki-ta," "to seek something." 3. Possessive, indicating possession of object by the subject. 4. Reflexive, as "ici-pte," "to kill oneself." 5. Dative, as "ki-pa," "to keep for another;" "ki-ska-ta," "to play to, with, or for another." There is also another form, which indicates that the action falls upon the middle of the object, as "ki-ca-spa," "to divide in the middle."

The preceding rough sketch of the chief modifications of the verb will, I hope, have given some idea of its great flexibility. But the whole is not yet told. By the addition of a single syllable we can indicate the instrument used in the action, or the manner in which it is performed. Here are some examples: "Yu-ktan," "to bend with the hand;" "wa-na-ktan," "to bend with the foot;" "ba-ktan," "to make crooked with a knife;" "bo-ktan," "to bend by punching;" "o-na-ktan," "to bend into of itself;" "o-pa-hta," "to look steadily at anything;" "ya-sto," "to lick smooth," and so on, in infinite variety. Then, by using either incorporated syllables, or auxiliary verbs or adverbs, we can express simply and briefly the so-called dubitative, suppositive, traditional, causal and reciprocal forms with a pithiness which our language altogether lacks. In Dr. Riggs' grammar the curious may see exhibited a simple verb, expanded in a few of the ways I have mentioned, and even then giving nearly 500 changes. We cannot now say more concerning the verbs, unless we add this interesting fact, that, as is, I believe, the case in other American languages, there is no pure substantive verb in Dakota. We can express the idea of existence in connection with ideas of place or condition—but not alone.

Amongst a people whose only book is nature, with her ever varying symbols, we should expect to find, especially if they be a race of great imaginative power, a language full of poetry and metaphor.

Some time ago a mild controversy was waged in a local paper concerning the name Minnedosa and its meaning. The chief difficulty seemed to be about the latter, for while one held its meaning to be "hills and water," the other contended it meant "running water." In reality there is no such word as Min-ne-dosa. The Dakota word which it is supposed to represent is "Mi-ni-ka-du-za," which is sometimes contracted to "Mi-ni-du-za," and means "a swift current." Though this is hardly a good example of what we have been speaking of, I have introduced it here because of the local interest attaching to the word. As an example of metaphor, let us take a word often used at this season, "Ma-cu-wi-ta," "I am cold," —literally, "my sides are dead or palsied;" in allusion, probably, to the uncontrollable quivering of the sides when one is thoroughly chilled. Again, a pretty bird with black and white plumage is called "the skunk's dog,' either because it is marked like a skunk, or because it is often found about the haunts of that animal. Here is another highly figurative expression: "Si-ya-ka-ma-o," "I have a sore or boil;" literally, "I am bitten or wounded by the 'si-ya-ka.'" The "si-ya-ka" is a small duck, probably the teal, but no further explanation of this obscure expression is forthcoming. The common fowl is called, "that which calls at day-break," a horse, a "great dog," or a "spirit dog;" a gun a "sacred iron;" a sheep "a tame white deer." "Ya-ta-ku-ni-sui" means "to speak contemptuously of," literally, "to destroy with the mouth," while another word meaning "to deafen by talking to," strictly rendered, is "to bite through the ear." Two other examples must suffice: "Pa-pa" means both "father" and "meat;" "ma-ma" both "mother" and "milk."

The language is poor in names of colors and numbers. Blue and green of all shades have but one word; so with other primal colors and connected shades—a deeper shade being expressed by reduplication, as "zi-zi," bright yellow. For cardinal numbers up to ten, there are distinct words, beyond that to 100, ten is always expressed or implied, as 16, "ten more six," or "six again;" 30, "three tens," etc. There is a curious exception to this in the case of 19, which is often spoken of as "the other nine." There seems to be no precise term higher than thousand, a million being called "the great count," and it is a significant fact that one-half is the only fraction we can express.

Within the limits of a short paper, it is of course impossible to take more than the most cursory glance at a language—full and rich, as is the Dakota. Of its fullness let the dictionary by Dr. Riggs, containing about 16,000 words, bear witness. We have yet to see what relation this tongue bears to Cree and the kindred dialects. As I have already intimated, they have nothing in common, or at least not more than almost all primitive tongues. There is the same tendency to synthesis, the same rejection of the copula in a sentence, the impotency to express certain ideas, foreign to the untutored mind, but still there is no real affinity. There certainly is a great difference. Affinity between languages we most naturally expect to find in roots of the most common verbs and nouns; but so far as our observation has gone we look in vain for such common roots in these languages. Let us take a few test words such as eat, drink, see, bread, wood.

English—Eat, drink, see, bread, wood.

Dakota—Yuta and wota, ya-tke, wan-ya-ke, agu-ya-pi, can.

Cree (Watkins)—Mechisoo, min-ekwao, twapew, pukwasikun, mistig.

Ojibway (Baraga)—Wis-sin, minikwe, wao, pak-we-jigan, mitig.

This is but a short list; but I believe a long examination would only give the same result.

There are, it is true, a few words in Dakota which have been borrowed from Cree or its dialects. Such are "o-kima," Cree; "o-kim-ow, "a chief; "ni-po," Cree; "ni-pew," to die; "ku-kus," Cree; "koo-koos-we-yas," pork. But examples of such are very few, and they are seldom used, except when speaking with those who are not very familiar with the language. Amongst themselves they generally use pure Dakota words. On the other hand the grammatical differences are great. For instance, in Dakota inanimate objects are treated in inflection exactly as the animate, excepting that they do not take a plural form.

Again, there are definite and indefinite articles, and a dual number, which are wanting in Cree. Lastly, in place of the twelve plural terminations of Ojibway, Dakota has one uniform ending for both nouns and verbs.

I am sometimes asked if there is any resemblance between this language and Hebrew. I am afraid if we are to seek for evidence of connection between the lost tribes and the Dakotas, we must not seek it in the language of the latter. Resemblances there certainly are, but I think they will prove but a poor foundation upon which to build any grand theory of a Jewish origin for our dusky neighbors. The following are some points of resemblance:—The synthetic form, the simple form of verb is the 3rd per., sing. ind.,—the use of only two distinct tenses, the causative, intensitive, reflexive and reduplicated forms or species, and the use of the future to express subjunctival relations. But all these affinities are probably owing to the primitive nature of each language. Simplicity, freedom, is the characteristic of all primitive tongues. For any verbal likeness we shall, so far as my own observation has gone, look in vain.

In conclusion, let me for one moment refer to a most interesting fact. There is in use amongst the "medicine men" a strange gibberish or dialect, used especially to throw an air of mystery about themselves and their doings. It consists (a) in the use of names of common objects in an altogether foreign sense; for instance "uncilit," "grandmother," is used for "sun;" (b) words derived from other languages, or (c) their own words used in a metaphorical sense; so that except to the initiated it is a sealed language. Much more might have been said on this interesting language, but we have no wish to be wearisome. If this rough sketch of the Dakota or "Allied" tribes should interest some few in their behalf, the writer will have been amply rewarded.